

Toward an e-commerce strategy: Impact of family dynamics

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1. Introduction

There has been interest in understanding how technology has affected business organizations since the mid-1950s when information technology (IT) was first applied to the business process (Markus & Robey, 1988). However, the phenomenal growth of e-commerce and the growing application of e-commerce to business processes has changed the nature of business transactions, and the way in which a business derives its value, making e-commerce initiatives increasingly important from a strategic point of view (Chang, Jackson, & Grover, 2002).

Early scholars mostly considered e-commerce as a way of selling a company's products over the internet (Herbig & Hale, 1997) by utilizing their websites for advertising, public relations, and customer service access (Griffith & Krampf, 1998). Later, it has been observed that e-commerce influences all sectors and all markets and is related to the total strategy and operations of enterprise, by connecting these operations with networks that exceed the limits of enterprise (Haig, 2001) to share business information, maintain business relationships, and conduct business transactions by means of telecommunications networks (Lagrosen, 2005).

Nowadays, the literature tends to consider e-commerce as “a business model in which transactions take place over electronic networks, mostly the Internet. It includes the process of electronically buying and selling goods, services, and information ... is not just about buying and selling; it also is about electronically innovating, communicating, collaborating, and discovering information. It is about e-learning, e-customer service, e-government, social networking, problem-solving, and much more” (Turban et al., 2018, p. v).

While this new economic environment offers potential benefits to societies and creates opportunities for businesses, it also poses a threat to traditional businesses, especially to family-controlled businesses. Family business is a popular form of business across the globe. According to the Family Firm Institute, family businesses represent two thirds of the businesses worldwide and contribute 70–90 percent of the global gross domestic product and 50–80 percent of the employment in the majority of the economies¹. Yet like their non-family counterparts, family businesses are vulnerable to challenges stemming from the external context. The disruption deriving from the smart development of e-commerce and more in general the internet-based economy and the digital economy can be one of these.

Although there are some debates about the precise definition of a family business, it is generally accepted that a family business is one where the family has a controlling interest and – unlike in non-family firms – the family is dominant in the strategic decision making of the business (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 1999; Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005; Dyer, 2003), and its influence is fundamental and enduring (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2014). The exploration of such influence has been the field of analysis of the line of research on “familiness,” a construct elaborated by Habbershon and Williams (1998).

In this chapter, we explore the effects of such family influence on the design and implementation of e-commerce strategy. To this aim we analyze three family businesses in China. Two of these cases have also been analysed in other works (Caspersz et al., 2017;

Caspersz et al. 2019). We concentrate our attention on China as, on the one hand, it has experienced a dramatic growth of e-commerce over the last years² and, on the other hand, family businesses are the dominant form of business among privately owned companies³.

We also make a conceptual contribution when discussing the implications of our findings on the e-commerce strategy of the firms in our study, proposing the inclusion of the family among the factors that influence the e-commerce adoption process, and suggest that dynamic capabilities may be useful in analyzing how the influence of the family contributes to configure the e-commerce business strategy by a family business.

We begin with reviewing the literature about studies on e-commerce strategy of family businesses. We then describe the approach that we have taken and report the findings from the case studies. Subsequently we discuss the implications of the findings, propose our conceptual contribution, and provide a brief commentary on our future research agenda.

2. Corporate Strategy and e-Commerce in Family Businesses: Review of the Literature

The involvement of the family in the strategy creation and implementation is largely recognized as the central, enduring and distinctive feature that distinguishes a family from a non-family business (Whetten, Foreman & Dyer, 2014). Thus the systemic influence of family (Habbershon & Williams 1999), and its psychological characteristics (adaptability, rigidity, cohesion, and the like) also affect the strategy creation process and the strategies adopted by the business (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999; Brunninge, Nordqvist, & Wiklund, 2007; Astrachan, 2010) as “it creates patterns of goals, strategies, and structures that are often formulated, designed and implemented in ways that can be radically different from non-family firms” (Salvato and Corbetta, 2014).

Though it can be a source of competitive advantage in strategic change (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermans, et al., 2010), family influence may result in conflicts in priorities

and goals for the business (Schulze, Lubatkin, Dino, Buchholtz, 2001), decision-making and control (Koeberle-Schmid and Caspersz, 2013), and ultimately, continuity of the business (Miller, Steier, & Le Breton-Miller, 2003).

Literature on strategic processes in family businesses has highlighted that the role of key family business actors and the action they perform is central in determining the dynamism of otherwise relatively inertia entities such as organizational routines and capabilities, and to understand how stability and change can be mutually determined, and become a duality, attention can be directed towards the subjectivity, agency and power exerted by key actors, which have power to leverage and reinterpret deeply rooted values, beliefs, and action patterns (Salvato, and Corbetta. 2014).

König, Kammerlander, and Enders (2013) argue, that the differences that family influence injects into the business system significantly affects when and how firms adopt discontinuous innovations and, thus, provide a new explanation for why incumbent firms, contrary to the prevailing paradigm, differ in their responses to discontinuous change.

The adoption of e-Commerce strategy falls into the category of discontinuous innovation, asking for strategic innovation, since it calls for fundamental reconceptualization of the business model and the reshaping of existing markets (by breaking the rules and changing the nature of competition) to achieve dramatic value improvements for customers and high growth for companies (Schlegelmilch, Diamantopoulos & Kreuz, 2003).

Under the new context created by the dramatic development of e-Commerce transactions, there are a series of questions awaiting to be addressed. For example: how family influence accommodates to the new environment, given that control is often a core concern of family businesses (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005); how family businesses adjust their resources and processes to align with the e-commerce business model; what education and training should family businesses adopt for their key actors to ensure effective strategic

thinking, in the e-commerce context; how do family businesses sustain and further develop their socioemotional (Berrone Cruz, Gomez-Meja, 2012) and financial wealth; how do family businesses adjust their resources and processes to develop competitive advantages under the new climate. These questions are crucial to the development of family businesses in the new era.

We reviewed the literature on corporate strategy and e-commerce in family businesses, primarily drawing upon academic articles published in academic journals. Since our focus is on family businesses, we reviewed those journals specifically devoted to this field of study – Family Business Review and Journal of Family Business Strategy - and extended our analysis to Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, which is considered as one of the journals relevant to family business research (De Massis, Sharma, Chua, Chrisman, 2012). However, we did not find any contribution that directly and explicitly dealt with e-commerce, and e-commerce strategy, in Family Businesses in any of these journals. So, we extended our search to other academic journals. The search was conducted using Google Scholar, and the keys “e-commerce” and “family business” and “strategy” in the fields of title, keywords, and abstract. We sourced 22 references, where, in most cases, family business was associated with small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

Since our focus of interest is on a) e-Commerce corporate strategy in family businesses, and b) the impact of the family on the decision and the process of adopting e-Commerce, we concentrated our review on those articles dealing with this topic. We then added 23 more references that were cited in the 22 previous references, reaching the total number of 45 references, 28 of which are journal articles. Even though this list of references is not exhaustive, we are confident that this is an appropriate good representation of literature thus far.

A general search shows that even though only a few journals published articles on this topic, no journal has published more than one article in the same year, there has been an absence

of interest in the topic within the key scholarly journals addressing family business studies, and it seems that the interest of scholars on the issue is also sporadic. Finally, it was interesting to notice that among all the 45 references, only one (Chang, Jackson, and Grover, 2002) included “Corporate Strategy” in its title. We thus conclude that there is an absence of relevant scholarly research that addresses our topic.

However, from the overall analysis of the collected literature, main topics and areas of research regarding the adoption of e-commerce in SMEs emerge and are reported in Figure 6.1.

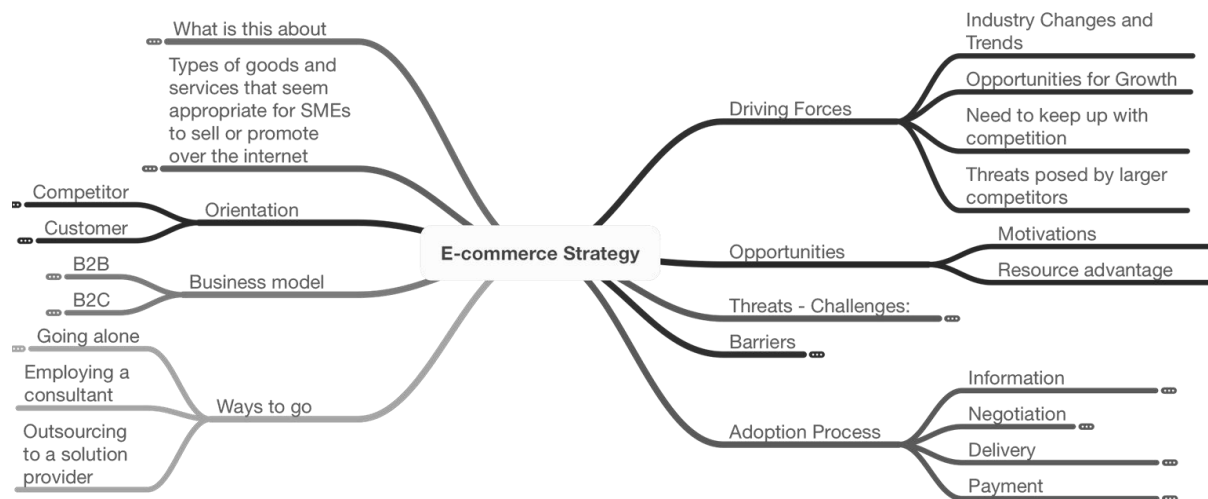


Figure 6.1 – Main topics and areas of research regarding the adoption of e-commerce in SMEs emerging from the literature review

Chang et al. (2002) conducted a study that focused on the integration between corporate strategy and e-commerce. They adopted Narver and Slater’s (1990) conceptualization of market orientation focusing on customer orientation and competitor orientation and identified the most relevant components of these two dimensions.

Drew (2003) analyzed different areas of the strategic use of e-Commerce by SMEs in the East of England, highlighting that the most important Driving Forces for the adoption of

e-Commerce include industry changes and trends, opportunities for growth, need to keep up with competition, and threats posed by larger competitors.

Levenburg and Magal (2005) made an effort to identify small firms' motivations for engaging in e-business, suggesting that motivations fall into different categories, which can be synthesized as follows. (1) Marketing-related, including the desire to increase sales (Access Markets International Partners, 2001; Griffith & Krampf, 1998; Levenburg, Schwarz, & Dandridge, 2002; Pratt, 2002; Gadish, 2009; Huang, 2008), either by reaching new customers and markets (Bernroider, 2008) and/or by retaining customers' loyalty (Access Markets International Partners, 2001; Barua, Konana, Whinston, & Yin, 2001; Chordas, 2001; Zank & Vokurka, 2003; Levenburg & Magal, 2005; Huang, 2008); alleviating time constraints placed on staff by providing customer service in person (Pool, Parnell, Spillan, Carraher, & Lester, 2006; Samanta & Kyriazopoulos, 2009; Levenburg & Klein, 2006); accomplishing advertising, promotion, and public relations (Access Markets International Partners, 2001); enhancing the firm's image (Stephenson, Lockwood, & Raven, 2003); improving customer satisfaction (Chordas, 2001); and improving customer retention (Zank & Vokurka, 2003). (2) The desire to develop and strengthen a relationship with key constituents (Access Markets International Partners, 2001; Barua et al., 2001; Chordas, 2001; Zank & Vokurka, 2003), mainly (but not exclusively) suppliers and customers, obtained thanks to the possibility to use the potential of the internet to cater for customers' needs, wants, and preferences. (3) Aiming to improve financial performance through operational efficiencies (Gadish, 2009; Bernroider, 2008; Chang et al., 2002), enabling a reduction in cost of operations for the company (Gadish, 2009; Samanta & Kyriazopoulos, 2009); reduced accounts receivable (Zank & Vokurka, 2003); reduced transaction costs (Surjadjaja, Ghosh, & Antony, 2003); reduced costs of sales and delivery fulfillment (Access Markets International Partners, 2001); reduced direct or administrative costs (Levenburg et al., 2002); reduced inventory (Zank & Vokurka, 2003);

across-the-board cost reductions (Chordas, 2001; Pratt, 2002); increased profits (Levenburg, Schwarz, & Dandridge, 2002; Pratt, 2002); increased income (Samanta & Kyriazopoulos, 2009); better return on investment (Huang, 2008); increased profits (Levenburg et al., 2002; Pratt, 2002). (4) The desire to obtain information, mainly gaining supply chain sourcing information (Pool et al., 2006; Levenburg & Magal, 2005). (5) Buying reasons, mainly by reaching new suppliers (Bernroider, 2008) and improving supplier relationships (Access Markets International Partners, 2001; Barua et al., 2001; Chordas, 2001; Zank & Vokurka, 2003; Levenburg & Magal, 2005; Huang, 2008).

Huang (2008) identified the e-Commerce development strategy dimensions by business as being pursued to gain resource advantage, competitive advantage and performance advantage. Whereas competitive and performance advantage include most of the elements in the classification offered by Levenburg and Magal (2005), resource advantage (Huang, 2008) mainly consists of improving professional management capabilities (Huang, 2008) and increasing the likelihood of adopting a double loop form of organizational learning, which can lead to new core competencies and competitive advantage (Chaston, 2001; Huang, 2008).

While the interest in the advantages and opportunities stemming from e-commerce seem to be dominant, some scholars have also highlighted that e-commerce can generate threats emerging from increased competition, intensified price competition, power shifting down along the distribution channel to the final customer, and the emergence of new buying behavior. e-Commerce acts as an accelerator in the multiplication of customer options (Chang, Jackson, and Grover, 2002; Bernroider, 2008), reduction in customer searches, reduction in switching costs, distribution of information on new products, access to new sales channels, and a reduction in entry barriers (level capital requirements) (Chang, Jackson, and Grover, 2002).

The study of barriers to the development of e-Commerce has been the field of interest of a number of scholars who have grouped these into external barriers – that is, supply

(Hadjamanolis, 2000; MacGregor, and Kartiwi, 2010), demand (Hadjamonolis, 1999; MacGregor, and Kartiwi, 2010), and environmental (Hadjamonolis, 1999; MacGregor, and Kartiwi, 2010; Jennex, Amoroso, & Adelakun, 2004; Chiware & Dick, 2008; Cloete, Courtney, & Fintz, 2002; Zhao, Wang, and Huang, 2008; Mukti, 2000; Dedrick & Kraemer, 2001; Oshikoya & Hussain, 2007; Drew, 2003; Markus and Soh, 2002; Jennex, Amoroso, & Adelakun, 2004; Chepaitis, 2002) – and internal barriers – related to resources (Hadjamonolis, 1999; MacGregor, and Kartiwi, 2010; Mutula & VanBrakel, 2007; Zhao, Wang, and Huang, 2008; Jennex, Amoroso, & Adelakun, 2004; and systems.

The process followed to adopt e-Commerce – initiate, decide, implement - has been studied by Molla, Heeks, and Balcells (2006). They expanded the technology-organizations-environment framework developed by Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990), by including managerial factors, and grouping the factors affecting e-Commerce adoption into four categories: contextual, organizational, managerial, and e-commerce specific.

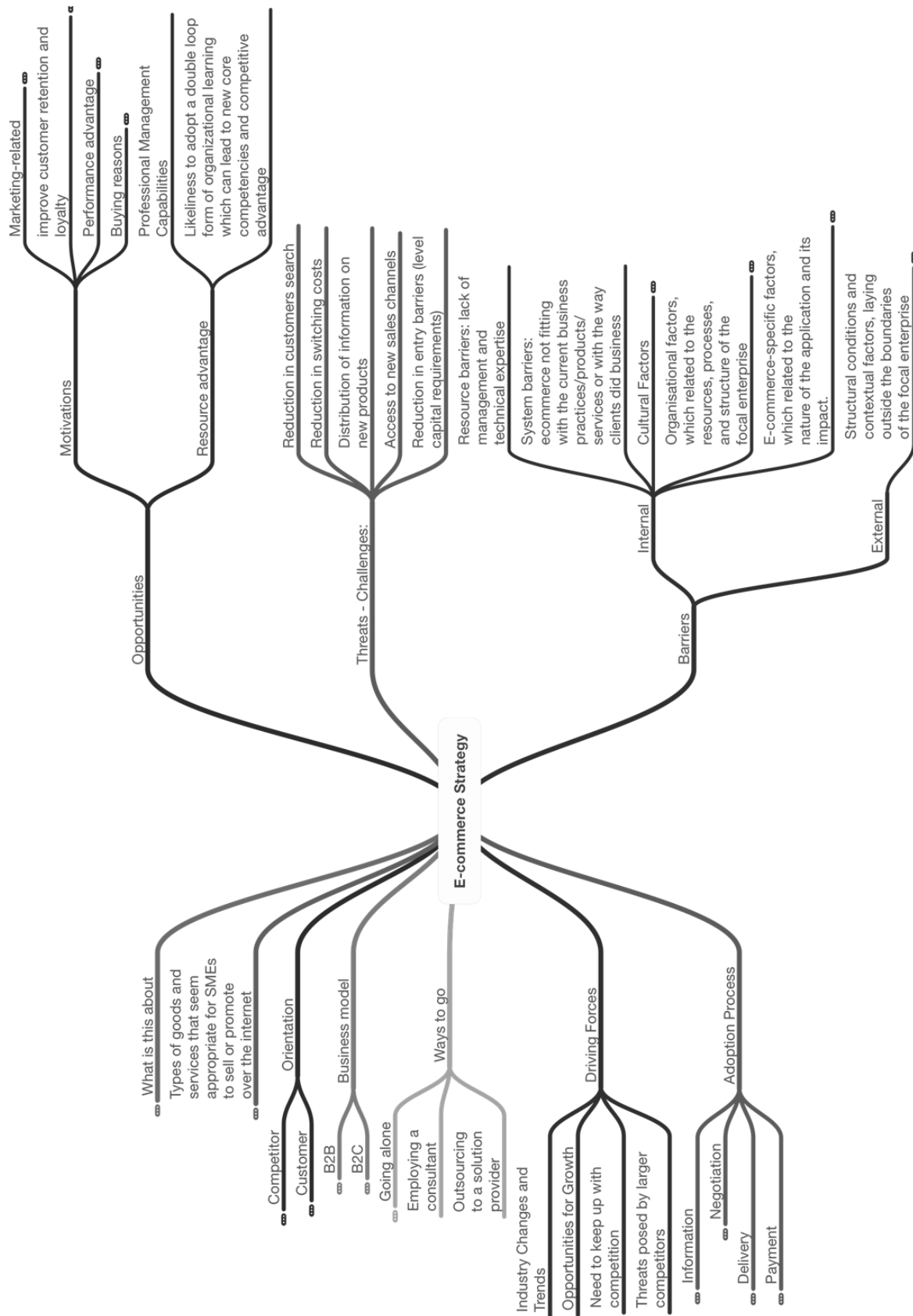
Based on the analysis of two successful and very renown Chinese e-businesses - CCEC and Alibaba - Zhao, Wang, and Huang (2008) built a model describing the four phases of transactional process: information, negotiation, payment and delivery. In summary, the broader literature has identified different aspects of corporate strategy in e-Commerce. It has proposed definitions of e-Commerce, and tried to identify the types of goods and services that seem more appropriate for SMEs to sell or promote over the internet; it has described strategic orientation toward competitors and customers, the different pathways followed, and the various business models that can be adopted. Furthermore, the literature has identified the most important driving forces and factors influencing the development of e-Commerce, the motivations that influence the decision to adopt e-Commerce, the main opportunities and threats faced by SMEs in engaging in e-Commerce, and analyzed the e-Commerce adoption process. A visual synthetization of our review is represented in Figure 6.2, reporting the main lines and areas of

research emerging in the literature. Also, in the appendix, we offer a literature table (Table 6A.1) integrating the list of academic articles included in our review.

Despite this extensive canon, we did not find any contribution devoting attention to the role played by the family in deciding to adopt e-commerce and designing and implementing e-commerce strategies in family businesses. The literature diffusely reports how much e-commerce represents a true challenge to the traditional way of doing business for any company.

We hypothesize that in the case of a family business, given its grounding in tradition and the values of the family, and the central role of key family business actors and the action they perform in determining the firm's dynamism, such a dramatic change might find the family either as a supporter or as a detractor of such a shift, depending on the attitude of key family actors. Similarly, the adoption of e-commerce models can have positive and negative repercussions on the family side.

This proposition is consistent with the generally accepted idea that family is dominant in the strategic decision making of the business (Chua et al., 1999; Dyer 2003; Brunninge et al., 2007; Astrachan, 2010), and that such dominance comes out from the distinctive bundle of resources a firm develops as a result of family involvement and influence, namely familiness (Habbershon & Williams, 1998). Chrisman, Chua, and Litz (2003, p. 468) refined the concept and described familiness as “resources and capabilities related to family involvement and interactions.”



Source: Caspersz et al. (2019).

Figure 6.2 A visual synthesis of the main lines and areas of research on e-commerce strategy emerging in the literature

Pearson, Carr, and Shaw (2008) analyzed the behavioral and social resources that constitute familiness, as well as its antecedents and outcomes, through the lenses of social capital perspective. They highlighted that resources fall into three dimensions – structural (i.e. network ties, appropriable organization), cognitive (i.e. shared vision, shared language), and relational (i.e. trust, norms, obligations, identification) – and that the idiosyncratic combination of such dimensions of resources determines the family firm capabilities, made of information access (i.e. efficient action and exchange) and associability (i.e. collective goals, collective actions, and emotional support). Also, they identified the antecedent conditions that help create familiness: time, that is the durability and stability of the relationship; closure, or the boundaries of the social networks and the uniqueness of the social capital context; interdependence; and interaction.

Ensley and Pearson (2005) focused their study on the on top management teams (TMT), reaching the conclusion that the unique dynamics created by the social aspects of the family-owned firm will result in higher cohesion, potency, task conflict, and shared strategic consensus, than those TMTs with less familiness.

In another study (Caspersz et al., 2019) – relying on two of the three cases analyzed in this chapter, but focusing on organizational identity – we found support for the proposition that e-commerce has an influence on the organizational identity of family businesses. Our interest in the present chapter is to complement this by investigating how family relations affect the e-commerce strategy in family businesses.

In this way we try to contribute to the acquisition of more knowledge about e-commerce strategy adoption in family businesses.

3. Research Approach

Our research followed an exploratory and qualitative approach. Although the development of an accurate family business definition is still ongoing, researchers generally agree that family businesses refer to those where family holds significant ownership of the business and has remarkable impact on business management (DeMassis, Frattini, Pizzumo, & Cassia, 2015). As also reported in our previous work (Caspersz et al., 2019), we selected family businesses based on three criteria, supported by academic literature: (a) more than 50 percent of the voting shares are controlled by one family, and/or a single family group effectively controlling the business (Westhead, Cowling, & Howorth, 2001; DeMassis et al., 2015), (b) the company is perceived by its chief executive as a family business (Westhead et al., 2001); and (c) the chief executive anticipates passing the business to the next generation of family members (Astrachan & Kolenko, 1994). Moreover, we decided to incorporate SMEs in our study (based on the definition provided in the SME Promotion Law of China in 2003). By focusing on companies of a similar size, we avoided the risk of distracting heterogeneity as a result of difference in company size (De Massis et al., 2015). Where data collection was concerned, we relied on our contacts in the Beijing Institute of Technology and Hebei University of Technology. The two universities owned multi-dimensional connections with businesses because of their education and research activities. Via the connections, we sought to obtain a balanced sample of case companies taking into account both homogeneity and heterogeneity (cf. Merriam, 1988). We conducted field research in two diverse regions in China, namely Beijing, where many high-technology firms were located and was the capital of the country with well-developed market infrastructure, and the western inland Xinjiang autonomous region, which overall lagged behind other provinces in technology and market infrastructure but was rich in nascent opportunities for new and entrepreneurial activities. By doing this, we considered regional heterogeneity as well as data accessibility. In addition, owing to the nature of this research, we embraced companies that had embarked on the e-commerce platform, and this was to ensure

homogeneity and cross-case comparability. As a result, our study finally involved three family businesses, two of which were located in Beijing and one in Xinjiang. E-commerce recently commenced to demonstrate its dynamism in the Chinese economic landscape, particularly after the naissence of companies such as Alibaba Group and Tencent. The mesmerizing effect that these companies have created has either attracted followers that would attempt to maximize their utility via the online springboard, or imposed e-commerce on disadvantaged market players to maintain their legitimacy in the market.

We used semi-structured interviews with key informants in the firms, initially with the founder of each case company, in conjunction with a plan of further data collection from key family members and employees in management and non-management positions. We undertook visits to the headquarters of the three companies and interviews were conducted during the visits. Each interview commenced with a brief introduction explaining the purpose, process, and implications of the research. The interview questions were open-ended and focused on business history, business resources, as well as corporate and e-commerce strategies. The intention of this approach was to allow interviewees on the one hand to concentrate on our research foci, whilst on the other hand to bring in their own theses which were perceived relevant. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show the profiles of the case companies and interviewees.

Before the interviews, we identified a number of themes from the literature review that may be connected to e-commerce strategy. The purpose of this review was to form the foundation of our theoretical perspective, guiding us in the data collection and analysis. These themes were incorporated into our questionnaire design. Each interview lasted on average two to three hours. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin and were recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis. We obtained ethics approval for our research. The transcripts of the interviews vary from 23 to 40 pages.

We took an interpretative approach to data analysis, mainly because of the qualitative nature of the study in general, and the descriptive nature of the data in particular (Creswell, 1994). For each transcript we used coding to understand data; whenever information was ambiguous or further explanation was needed, we made telephone calls to case companies to clarify and confirm. Then we compared the transcripts of the case companies, highlighting similar comments and grouping them until final themes were developed. The narratives containing the final set of themes were organized accordingly.

Table 6.1 Case Company Profile

Case	Region	From	Main activities	Generation in control	Owned by
LM	Beijing	2001	Health medication and cosmetic products manufacturing	First	Founder
JY	Beijing	2010	Online training in accounting	Second	Founder and his son
WD	Xinjiang	1998	Vehicle parts sales and service	First	Founder and family and non-family staff members

Table 6.2 Interviewee Profile

Case	Interviewee	Gender	Age	Education
LM	Founder	Female	70+	University degree education
JY	Owner-Manager (second generation)	Male	40+	University degree education
WD	Founder	Female	Early 50s	University degree education

Findings

This section of the book chapter reports the main findings of our research. For each one of the three cases, it reports the business background, the e-commerce strategy, and the influence of the family on the e-Commerce strategy.

Case 1: LM

Business Background

LM was a healthcare medication product manufacturing company founded in 2001 by the founder who had recovered from cancer; the business initially adopted a direct sales model. In 2016, the business recorded 500-million-yuan worth assets and 6 billion yuan annual sales, employing approximately 1,000 employees in Beijing and Shanghai. However, from 2011 the model started to be challenged by a series of changes in economic environment, including radical development of high technologies and e-commerce. Young talented people in the business were attracted by novelty of the technology and the opportunities it offered for career development. This put the business on the edge of losing its human capital. The founder finally decided to embark on e-commerce.

e-Commerce Strategy

At the beginning, the founders attempted to integrate the existing offline direct marketing with the new online channels. But the model did not work, and the result was less optimistic than expected. The online and offline teams had different views and perspectives and could not understand each other. This drove the founder to separate the offline and online commerce to two parallel businesses, each one with its own team, market segmentation and associated performance tasks. To sustain this strategy with adequate financial resources, the founder further decided to go public, float one third of the company on the stock market, as well as engage in charity activities. The expectation was that the company would no longer be perceived as a traditional manufacturing firm, but a cutting-edge business equipped with new technology, strategic wisdom, capital market operation, and social responsibility orientation. The founder named this as “3 +1 strategy”, a sustainable long-term strategy, focusing on health medication products manufacturing, e-commerce, capital market operation, plus charity activities.

In this context, health medication products manufacturing was perceived as the foundation of the firm. e-commerce was used as an auxiliary tool, opening a new trading platform for the firm, in addition to traditional offline trading. The adoption of e-commerce also created an impact on the corporate vision. Whereas in the past it had a single focal point, health medication, the adoption of e-commerce allowed the company to provide products that could offer customers and employees greater, better and more quality life.

Influence of the family on e-Commerce strategy

E-commerce adoption in LM can be viewed as a result of family relationship balancing. e-commerce adoption was initiated by the founder's son, along with a group of young and talented managers. After being lobbied from various angles, the founder finally accepted the concept that e-commerce could offer the firm opportunities in optimizing its operations and performance. But she and her son viewed differently the impact of e-commerce on business. The founder's stance was conservative, with the belief that the business' competitive advantage was originated from the manufacturing and e-commerce could only assist in extending marketing capacity. The son, however, saw e-commerce as a tool to reform the organization's foundation.

After intensive debates, the founder made her final decision, "in the company, I am the empress and he is the subordinate. He can make suggestions ... whether I take the suggestions is a matter of myself... company is different from family and we pay attention to rules and governance." The son was eventually assigned to be in charge of the e-commerce division, but e-commerce was configured to serve as a marketing strategy, not an overarching strategy. The appointment of the son was to keep him identified with the firm, as well as satisfying his desire for independency.

Case 2: JY

Business Background

JY was founded in 2010, relying on the experience of an accounting lecturer who had experiences in preparing candidates for the exams as a certified accountant. The business was established as a partnership between the lecturer's son, who had resigned from a computer programming company, and a friend of him, who was an IT specialist. Later on, the father joined the partnership and the equity became equally shared by the three.

The company dedicated to digital education was located in Beijing, providing services related to preparing candidates for examinations in accounting for qualifications as junior and senior accountants and certified accountants. The training targeted examinations set up by national professional institutions and was delivered via online videos, online live lectures, and face-to-face interaction. By doing so, the founder adopted a user-friendly flexible approach that differed from conventional training. The business had grown since inception and in 2016 it employed about 50 people.

e-Commerce strategy

The e-commerce adoption strategy of JY was organic, unlike LM. The father of the incumbent executive (the founder) was a university lecturer specialized in accounting. Because of his distinguished teaching, accreditation bodies frequently invited him to train practitioners for their qualifications or specialty licenses. It was on this basis, coupled with the son's IT knowledge, that in 2010 they decided to found JY, one of the earliest online accounting education firms. The business delivered accounting courses online to students desiring for accounting certificates issued by professional institutions. JY adopted a B2C business model, creating a direct connection with customers. Online activities were the core of the business, supported by staff members working offline.

E-commerce was rooted in JY's operations, since the courses in accounting and the supplementary services were delivered via online live lectures, online videos, as well as

supplementary face-to-face interaction. Despite being one of the first movers to the field and the utilization of the most advanced technology, the company confronted emulation pressure from competitors. This pushed the founder to further diversify. In the son's words, "If we only know software and e-commerce, without expertise in this specific field, we cannot be successful. e-commerce is only a medium for us, but can enable us to extend."

Influence of the family on e-Commerce strategy

JY built up its competitive advantage through the combination of the first generation's subject expertise, the son's knowledge, and online technology. In this context, e-commerce became an overarching strategy as a result of a natural process, enabled by harmonious relationship between the two generations. The two generations were able to appreciate strengths and weaknesses of each and had the wisdom to combine them in an original way. The interaction between the two generations was constructive, encouraging a more rounded and bespoke decision to be taken. Eventually, e-commerce was adopted as a corporate strategy, as this lay within the boundary of the son's expertise. Additionally, the son believed the services buttressed by e-commerce would become a sun-rising arena, supporting future business development. Early entry into this field would only benefit, not undermine, the business long-term survival.

Case 3: WD

Business Background

The car component retailing business WD was launched by two sisters in early 1998 in Xinjiang, selling car components such as belts, filters, gearboxes, and plugs. With a funding of 100,000 yuan sourced from their savings and the sponsorship from their parents, they started the retailing service in the center of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Today, the company has 21 franchising branches in a range of cities throughout Xinjiang (the geographical size of Xinjiang was equivalent to Iran. Due to the massive area Xinjiang covered, the company set

up an array of branches to deliver the service). Towards the end of 2016, WD started to merge with an e-Commerce company located in Beijing that aimed to construct an overarching online platform to integrate a range of car component retailing companies at the provincial level. In 2016, WD employed 55 people, and had annual sales of 40 million yuan and registered assets of 5 million yuan.

e-Commerce strategy

WD engaged in e-Commerce in 2016 as a consequence of environmental shifts. With the ownership of 21 franchising branches across Xinjiang, WD in the past was perceived by competitors as a competitive force in the market. Yet, this competitiveness was difficult to sustain, due to oversupplies of similar products and competition from online platform companies. The risk of business decline in a short to medium term, if no strategic adjustment was taken, was apparent. The founder explained,

“We are in a difficult position. On the one hand, many small companies are selling similar products. Quality wise, customers are not easy to differentiate good or bad, unless they are specialists. On the other hand, recently online platform companies have entered into this sector. Through acquiring competent retailing companies, they buy in not only high quality assets but sector knowhow. Given their technological superiority and sponsorship from venture capitalists, they swiftly extend their market share, pushing us towards the corner”.

After a period of brainstorming and family debates, WD finally decided to team up with an online platform design company located in Beijing, and initiated a merging process. The agreement was that after the merger, the family would hold shares of the corporate firm and maintain their control over operations in the Xinjiang region. According to the grand plan, the online platform company would acquire a range of retailing companies akin to WD at the provincial level so that competitive advantages of both parties could be maximized. That is,

the online platform company specializing in designing e-Commerce interfaces would focus on technological aspects, whilst retailing companies that own customer bases, including garages, car repairing companies, and other direct customers, would concentrate on the development of distribution channels and logistics. The collaboration would offer efficient, accurate and economic services to a broader group of customers.

During the merge, WD paralleled the online selling to their traditional offline trading, where e-commerce played a complementary role, similar to that in LM. Ultimately, e-commerce would become an overarching strategy for the entire integrated corporate firm. In this context, e-commerce was prominent not only because it acted as a vehicle, offering support to the corporation; more importantly, the scenario shed light on the possibility that e-commerce, as a technological mechanism, might catalyze restructuring and reconfiguration in the entire sector. More interestingly, if this occurred in the car component retailing sector, it would not be surprising if a similar scenario occurred in other sectors, especially service-related sectors.

Influence of the family on e-Commerce strategy

e-Commerce adoption for WD was a matter of strategic adjustment, not a consequence of family interest, like what had occurred in LM. Between the two sisters, the younger sister (the founder) consistently showed superior business talents and wisdoms, and had a more powerful personality. Most of the strategic decisions were made by her, whilst in the process the older sister often actively participated, interacted with other stakeholders, and offered her perspectives whenever necessary.

e-Commerce adoption in the case of WD was rather passive. Neither of the two sisters was familiar with the online technology, nor were they prepared for the effect e-Commerce had caused to the sector, which was a traditional field that had little association with high technology. When they realized that new technology was shaking the foundation of the family business, they had no way to shun it but to face the reality. Under this circumstance, inter-

personal trust, stewardship, and family cohesion, that were the attributes woven in the family business fabric, showed their merits. Strategic actions such as exploration of technological partners, negotiation on the collaboration, and agreement on the merger, all occurred in a short period window, which won time for WD and placed it in an advantageous position.

Table 6.3 reports a synthesis and synoptic comparison of the three cases, synthesizing the main aspects of the business background, the business e-commerce strategy, and the family influence on the adoption of e-commerce.

LM	JY	WD
Business Background		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health medication products with plants in Beijing and Shanghai; initiated e-Commerce engagement in 2011, as a result of market transition; risk of losing its human capital, as the young generation employees, especially those well-educated, often identified themselves with state-of-art business operations, not traditional business routines; approximately 1000 employees in Beijing and Shanghai, and in 2016, 500 million yuan worth assets and 6 billion yuan annual sales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online training company specialised in accounting; was started, based in Beijing, as an online training company specialised in accounting in 2010, when the founder resigned from a computer programming company and commenced the business with his father, an experienced accounting lecturer, and a friend who was an IT specialist; user-friendly flexible approach that differed from conventional training; 50 staff members; annual sales around 16 million yuan in 2016. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selling car components such as belts, filters, gearboxes, and plugs; end of 2016, started to merge with an e-Commerce company located in Beijing that aimed to construct an overarching online platform to integrate a range of car component retailing companies at the provincial level; In 2016, WD employed 55 people, and had annual sales of 40 million yuan and registered assets of 5 million yuan. 21 franchising branches in a range of cities

LM	JY	WD
Business' e-commerce strategy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial attempt to combine existing offline selling with the new online channels. Outcomes far below expectations. Adjustment, by making offline and online trading independent, parallel to each other: each with its own team, market segmentation, and associated performance task. Expectation: to make the image of the company evolve from that of a traditional manufacturing firm, to that of a cutting-edge business equipped with new technology, strategic wisdom, capital market operation expertise, and social responsible orientation. Health medication and cosmetic products manufacturing as the foundation of the firm and e-Commerce used as an auxiliary tool, opening a new trading platform for the firm, in addition to traditional offline trading. On a second stage, the adoption of e-Commerce produced a relevant impact on the corporate vision, generating a focus change from narrowed to health medication, to a wide model of providing any product that can give customers and employees greater, better and more quality life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-Commerce adoption approach was organic since startup (2010). One of the earliest online accounting education firms, was founded on the basis of the father's accounting-focused expertise and the son's ICT knowledge. e-Commerce as an outcome of natural selection, attributable to the company's online feature and available resources. The courses were delivered via online live lectures, online videos, as well as supplementary face-to-face interaction. e-Commerce in this case was rooted into business operations. Challenge in differentiating its service from its competitors', as the founder realised that most of their competitors were offering training by using similar teaching material and same curriculum set up by accreditation bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement in e-Commerce in 2016 as a consequence of environmental shifts. Challenge: oversupplies of similar products and competition from online platform companies. Decision to team up with an online platform design company located in Beijing, and initiate a merging process. Online platform company specialising in designing e-Commerce interfaces focusing on technological aspects, whilst retailing companies would concentrate on the development of distribution channels and logistics. Initially e-Commerce played a complementary role. Ultimately, e-Commerce would become an overarching strategy for the entire integrated corporate firm.

Table 6.3 – Synoptic comparison of the three cases.

LM	JY	WD
Impact of the Family on e-Commerce strategy		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e-Commerce adoption as a result of family relationship balancing between the founder and her son: • the founder believed that business survival ought to rely on manufacturing, while e-Commerce may help in extending marketing capacity. • the son perceived e-Commerce as a mechanism to restructure the organization fundamentally. • Since the founder considered herself as “the empress”, and the son as “subordinate”: • The son was eventually assigned to be in charge of the e-Commerce division, but e-Commerce was configured to serve as a marketing strategy, not an overarching strategy. • The appointment of the son was mainly to keep him identified with the firm, as well as satisfying his desire for independency. • In the foreseeable years, e-Commerce would only play a supplementary role. • Since the founder considered herself as “the empress”, and the son as “subordinate”: • The son was eventually assigned to be in charge of the e-Commerce division, but e-Commerce was configured to serve as a marketing strategy, not an overarching strategy. • The ability of the son to work behind the scene, actively advocating e-commerce and proposing the new strategy, determined the smooth, but substantial transformation of the business strategy, without challenging the “empress” leadership. • A significant change in the founder’s attitude towards e-commerce happened when her daughter introduced her to online shopping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational relationship harmonious and pleasant; • Though he was not a specialist in management, the father was happy to contribute and offer his own perspective to his son for reference; • This was helpful to the son when the decision on e-Commerce was made, since the interaction was constructive, encouraging a more rounded and bespoke decision to be taken. • Eventually, e-Commerce was adopted as a corporate strategy, as this lied within the boundary of the son’s specialty knowledge. • Additionally, the son believed services buttressed by e-Commerce would become sun-rising sectors, supporting future business development. • Early entry into this field would only benefit, not undermine, the business long term survival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between the two sisters was sound and well balanced: • the young sister (the founder) consistently showed superior business talents and wisdoms, and was more powerful in personality. Most of strategic decisions were made by her. • the old sister often actively participated, interacted with other stakeholders, and offered her perspectives whenever necessary. • e-Commerce adoption was rather passive: a matter of strategic adjustment, not a consequence of family interest compromising; • Neither of the two sisters was familiar with the online technology, nor were they prepared to the effect e-Commerce had caused to the sector. • When they realized that new technology was shaking the foundation of the family business, they had no way to escape but to face the reality. • Under this circumstance, inter-personal trust, stewardship, and family cohesion, the attributes woven in the family business fabric, demonstrated their merits. • Thus strategic actions such as exploration of technological partners, negotiation on the collaboration, and agreement on the merge all occurred in a short period window, which gained time and placed the company in an advantageous position.

Table 6.3 – Synoptic comparison of the three cases (follows).

Discussion

Our research addressed how e-commerce strategy affects the family business organization. This impact is reflected in two aspects in our study: the first is on business operations (i.e. industrial impact) and the second is on family relationships (i.e. familial impact). Therefore, our study makes a contribution in that it highlights not only the business issue (e-commerce reshapes business operations) but also the influence of the family on the adoption of e-commerce.

While change in any organization can be planned (top down), emergent (bottom up), contingent on the context in which the organization is embedded, or by management choosing how to respond to their environment (Todnemby, 2005), organizations must manage these changes for the purpose of their business survival and long-term success. In sum, in today's dynamic environment business organizations must be adaptable and respond quickly to change. If not, organizations may be outpaced by competitors, and their overall business value proposition will be threatened.

In our case studies, we noted how the pressure of wider trends influenced the companies to adopt, to a greater or lesser extent, e-Commerce practices. This was especially notable in the cases of LM and WD, although deepening their e-Commerce engagement was inevitable for JY given the nature of the business. The main motivation for the businesses to adopt e-commerce was related to their search for competitive advantage (Drew, 2003; Phan, 2003; Porter 1990; Bernroider, 2008, Huang, 2008; Levenburg and Magal, 2005), even though, in the case of LM, there was also the desire to reinforce the relationship with younger generation employees, which were considered key-constituents of the business (Access Markets International (AMI) Partners, 2001; Barua, Konana, Whinston, and Yin, 2001; Chordas, 2001; Zank and Vokurka, 2003). Thus, e-Commerce 'forced' a change in all three companies, as they restructured to keep up with market trends. However, maintaining and further extending

competitive advantages that an organization has in the marketplace is also crucial. Thus, while embracing the opportunity afforded to them by applying e-Commerce to their business practices, in weaving e-Commerce into the corporate strategy and reconfiguring resources and their operational model accordingly, the case companies engaged in an evolutionary process as described by Molla, Heeks, and Balcells (2006).

The evidence suggests that the case companies were mindful that e-Commerce could either complement or dominate their business value proposition (Samanta and Kyriazopoulos, 2009). When e-Commerce was perceived as playing a dominant role as in the case of JY, the business founder organized logistic support and ensured that all the services that the company was offering were lined up with e-Commerce. Alternatively, when the use of e-Commerce was not deemed as delivering the mainstream organizational value as in the case of LM, the company founder readily 'side-lined' e-Commerce in their business processes. As a result, this posture of the founder was forced to change by the disruptive impact of e-commerce, and she finally reconsidered both the role of e-commerce in the business' corporate strategy, and the position of the son in the business strategy design. Notably, the founder's change of perspective was stimulated by her relationship with the daughter who insistently asked her to experience e-commerce from a buyer's perspective. Once she understood the importance of e-commerce for clients, she also changed her mind in respect to its role in the business, and the confidence to be attributed to her son.

Finally, in the case of WD, both resource and system barriers (Hadjamolis, 2000; MacGregor and Kartiwi, 2010) emerged in respect to the unprepared corporate culture and synchronizing of e-commerce with the current business practices.

Clearly, the case companies demonstrated agility to engage with e-Commerce. In fact, with the emergence of information technologies, market competition becomes intensified. In this competitive environment, where the competitive territory is shifting, managers cannot

expect to develop long term solutions or routines for business operations, but to consider nurturing, or further developing, their agility to continuously reconfigure their resources and re-sketch strategies to address market changes (Zahra, Sapienza, and Davidsson, 2006): e-Commerce presented the case companies with this opportunity.

The case studies also offer some insights on the influence of the family relationship in the adoption of e-Commerce showing the existence of synergies among the family firm's behavioral and social resources, and the resulting capabilities that represent the heart of family firm social capital, namely, familiness (Habbershon et al., 2003). The three stories confirm the imperfect imitability of family history (each of the three cases has different family history), the social complexity of informal decision making, and the casual ambiguity created by family routines (Pearson, Carr, & Shaw. 2008).

They also show the existence of a dynamic relationship between structural, cognitive, and relational dimensions, that generate the conditions of strategic alignment indispensable to adopt a dramatically innovative strategic decision, such as the one to enter e-commerce.

In JY and WD, e-Commerce was brought in relatively easily where the family relationship was harmonious and mutually respectful. The father and son in JY and the two sisters in WD were stewards, who shared common interests and had common understanding of business operations and strategic position. When e-Commerce adoption was concerned, teamwork, egalitarian and collaboration at the top management were available, and this further motivated non-family employees to take collective actions. Though e-Commerce was finally positioned at different levels in JY and WD respectively, there was a spirit of unanimity shared by family members, resulting in a comfortable settling in of the new technology.

The situation in LM differed, where the intergenerational relationship was more like principal versus agent. Intergenerational conflicts in this case exist, where the founder was more autocratic and demanded compliance from the young generation. In China, the underlying

philosophy of Confucianism creates highly paternal, hierarchical structures in which respect to senior generation is demanded (Goel, He, and Karri 2011). In this context, intergenerational conflicts that may be dealt with openly in the West are unlikely to be aired, let alone solved. In LM, e-Commerce was to a certain extent adopted as a compromising strategy to minimize agency behavior. Nevertheless, the disruptive impact of e-Commerce induced a change in the founder's attitude in that she finally understood its relevance for the long-term survival of the business. And such attitude was favored by the influence of a family member (the daughter) who had no official and factual engagement with the business, but (perhaps just because of this) was able to make the founder open her mind and consider e-commerce from a different perspective. This is consistent with Pearson, Carr, & Shaw (2008) suggestion that in a family firm, the family and the business do not exist as distinct entities, but, instead, are enmeshed with one another, creating a complex, interactive web of relationships encompassing both the family and the firm, and that familiness arises from the synergies among the behavioral and social resources contained within this system.

The literature has highlighted that among the many sources of motivation that drive family businesses to engage in e-Commerce is the search for a resource advantage through developing and strengthening the relationship with key constituents (Access Markets International (AMI) Partners, 2001; Barua, Konana, Whinston, and Yin, 2001; Chordas, 2001; Zank and Vokurka, 2003). Our cases highlight that in addition to suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders – such as workers, in the case of LM -, the family has to be recognized as a key-constituent in family businesses, and one that stands in a very influential position (Sharma, 1997; Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999; Dyer 2003).

Implications, proposed conceptualization and future research agenda

Our findings suggest that in applying e-Commerce to their business process, the peculiar characteristics of family business create unique challenges to corporate strategy design and implementation.

Our research supports the proposition that e-commerce has an impact on the culture of the organization. That is because e-commerce disrupts both the structure and operations of an organization, and the organizational culture, in particular the locus of control. In family businesses, the locus of control is highly significant, and this is usually the family (in many cases, the founder). Thus, our contribution lies in providing preliminary illustration that an e-commerce strategy disrupts the family in the family business. This, of course, has long term implications for the continuity of family businesses.

All the case study companies seem to support the proposition that along with other enabling and constraining factors that are identified in the literature, the family should also be considered as a crucial element in strategic changes. Thus, our exploratory research has identified the family as a key variable in addition to those identified by Molla, Heeks, and Balcells (2006) as specifically influencing corporate strategy and e-commerce adoption in family business (see Figure 6.1). We therefore adjust the original model proposed by Molla, Heeks, and Balcells (2006) to include the family and its dynamics as being among the influencing factors affecting e-Commerce and corporate strategy in family businesses (Figure 6.3).

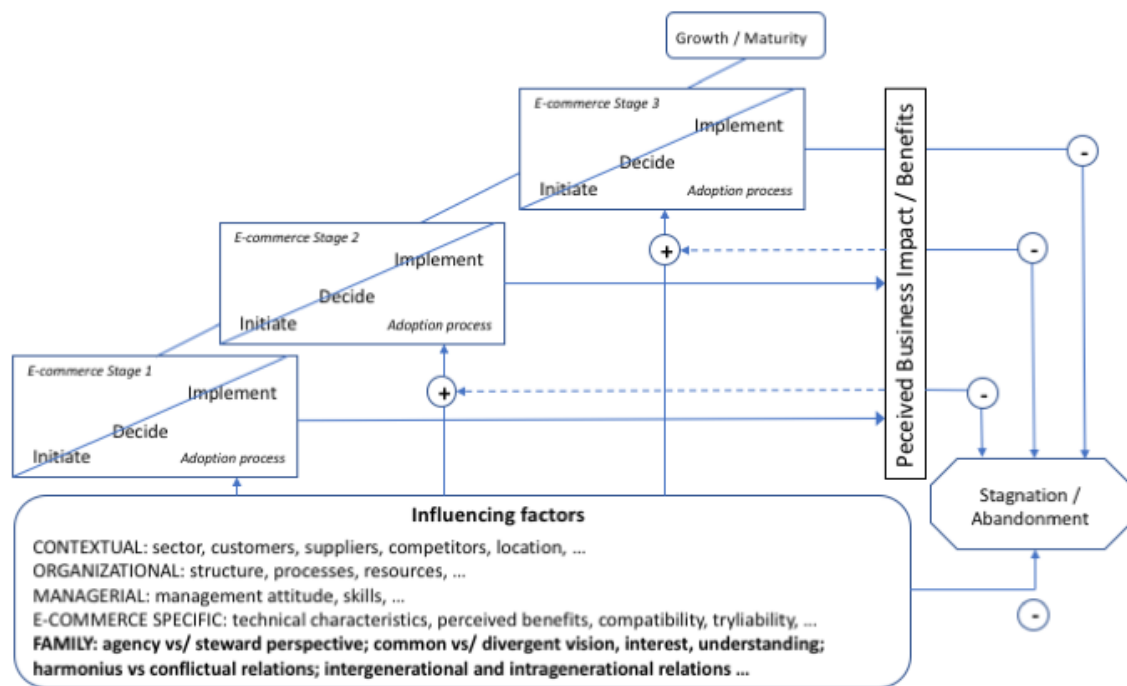


Figure 6.3 – Conceptual model for e-commerce adoption process in family businesses

In considering our findings, we suggest that the concept of dynamic capabilities may be relevant in respect to the agility of family businesses to continuously reconfigure their resources and re-sketch strategies to address not only market changes (Zahra, Sapienza, and Davidsson, 2006), but also internal challenges related to the relationship between family members. Originally, the term dynamic capabilities referred to a firm's ability to integrate, build and refigure external and internal competencies to take advantage of rapidly changing environments (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). In China, the concept has been usefully applied to understanding how the broader environment that frames business operations (Li & Lui, 2014), and the relational environment within firms themselves (Lin, Su, & Higgins, 2016), influences the dynamic capability of firms to embrace management innovations. Thus, while Li & Lui (2014) found that environmental dynamism within the broader environmental context

is a driver for the adoption of dynamic capabilities that can contribute to the firm performance, Lin, Su, & Higgins, (2016) found that the relational capability of managers themselves acted as a dynamic capability that, in turn, influenced the propensity to adopt management innovations, such as in e-Commerce applications.

This conceptualization seems relevant to the findings from our case studies. We thus suggest that this conceptualization of dynamic capabilities – particularly the relational capability – may be useful in analyzing how the influence of the family contributes to configuring the fitting of e-Commerce into the corporate strategy of family businesses. That is, when perceived as a dynamic capability that is influenced by both the broader environmental dynamism in which a firm operates, as well as the internal affect-related relationships in a firm, the choice of the e-Commerce business model may well be explained as one that balances the need of effectiveness and efficiency that satisfies market interests, and that to manage the influence of the family over the business and maintain efficacy in decision-making.

Our research contributes to the suggestion by Astrachan (2010) that further research is needed in examining how family dynamics affect strategic issues such as innovation. Nevertheless, we are unsure whether this finding is unique to the Chinese context, or perhaps an emerging economy phenomenon, and we recognize the need for further research to understand the dynamics that we reported here.

Our findings give a positive answer to both the question of whether the adoption of e-Commerce has an influence on family businesses, and whether family dynamics influence e-commerce strategy in family businesses.

Nevertheless, a number of gaps and controversies need to be overcome to advance in our understanding of the impact of e-commerce on family businesses. Further research is needed to answer such questions as how does family influence accommodate to the new environment, given that control is often a core concern of family businesses? How do family

businesses adjust their resources and processes to align with the e-commerce business model? What education and training should family businesses adopt for their key actors to ensure effective strategic thinking? How do family businesses sustain and further develop their socioemotional (Berrone Cruz, Gomez-Meja, 2012) and financial wealth? How do family businesses adjust their resources and processes to develop competitive advantages under the new climate?

Our future research agenda will investigate some of these aspects further. We hope to develop a longitudinal study, drawing on our case studies and other firms, to monitor how the family and the business reciprocally influence during the process of e-Commerce adoption and corporate strategy. Further, as the topic has only been qualitatively investigated, it needs validation through quantitative studies. We hope to develop reliable and valid instruments of analysis to this aim. These instruments form the foundation of the quantitative study and their relationships with e-Commerce adoption and family influence can then be tested. We further hope that we may be able to utilize an action-research agenda in implementing studies. However, given the limitations that we describe below of working with firms in the research site, we will have to consider our methodological approach carefully. Nonetheless, the importance of being able to undertake this research is that we will garner a rich canon of research that will inform us about how these dynamics affect their business continuity as a family business. The significance of family businesses not only in China, but also worldwide makes this a worthwhile endeavor.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not short of limitations, one of which is related to the research environment. First, family business as a business entity is relatively new in China. Family businesses sporadically emerged in China after the economic reform in 1979. Family firms as a whole do not feel

comfortable with the family icon, due to the ideological concern and historical reasons. Though the three companies involved accepted our research invitation, the extent of revelation of family related issues, or interactions between family and business, was limited. In fact, two companies repeatedly queried the research purpose and the potential usage of research findings at the beginning of interviews, and one even made it clear that she would strategically answer the questions, depending on the research purpose. Given the concerns that entrepreneurs have, it is less likely that researchers portray a comprehensive picture of the businesses studied. Second, Ralston et al. (1996) recognized wide-ranging variations among businesses from different regions of China. Whilst the level of regional economy influences business operations, technological infrastructure and social-cultural factors may have an impact on businesses. The three companies scrutinized in the current study were from two regions, Beijing and Xinjiang respectively, which only capture limited indigenous features of China.

Concluding Remarks

Research on e-Commerce adoption and the impact of family dynamics is scarce, in the field of family business studies though the significance of the research focus is potentially remarkable. The current study provides empirical evidence that irrespective of the way e-Commerce is maneuvered in businesses - either as an overarching platform or an auxiliary tool - there can be significant consequences on family dynamics, rather than simply on business matters. We suggest that future research in this field will further benefit from cross cultural comparison and longitudinal investigation. Indeed, the whole realm has remarkable space for future development and warrants substantial effort before one can expect to develop domain-specific theories.

NOTES

1. www.iffi.org/page/GlobalDataPoints.
2. In China, there has been a compound annual growth rate of 120 percent since 2003 in the e-commerce market. Further, e-commerce transactions from China commanded 5–6 percent of total world retail sales in 2012, compared to the United States share of 5 percent (Dobbs, Chen, Orr, Manyika, & Chang, 2013).
3. It is estimated that of the country's 10 million privately owned companies, 80 percent are family businesses (All China Federation of Industry and Commerce as quoted in "The Chinese family business in transition," <http://blog.msc-entrepreneurship.com/the-chinese-family-business-in-transition/>).

Appendix

Table 6.4 – Literature table

Author	Journal	Purpose of the study / Research questions	Data Source	Data Location	Method	Findings
Barua, Konana, Whinston, and Yin. (2001)	<i>Sloan Management Review</i>	Discuss how does a firm achieve operational excellence through e-business	approximately 1125 firms in the manufacturing, retail, distribution and wholesale sectors, that had a corporate website, and also used traditional channels of business	USA	Phone and web-based survey, using questionnaire consisted of thirty-nine items for ten drivers.	propose an operational model of e-business value creation, rooted in Information Technology (IT) business value research, that provides a reference framework for management, and offers guidance for e-business strategies.
Bernroider. (2008)	<i>International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising</i>	Analyze if the endogenous situation faced by the firm is interrelated with the applied level of e marketing initiatives. Develop a generic model of a firm's competitiveness that can be applied to any company of the target group, regardless of the products or services it produces.	141 software firms	Austria	Structured face-to-face interviews based on a stratified and disproportional sample with subgroups according to company size.	firms that perceive their relative strengths on branding, pricing, product diversity, internationalization and access to new technologies have adopted more advanced e-marketing support. The results reveal evidence supporting a positive relationship between assessed organizational performance factors and e-marketing utilization especially in MEs. The research assumption that a more intense e-marketing usage is connected with a stronger competitive position is supported by the analysis.
Chang, Jackson, and Grover. (2002)	<i>Information & Management</i>	Explore the integration between corporate strategy and e-commerce	145 Fortune 500 firms	USA	Content analysis of CEO's letter to shareholders	e-commerce initiatives are important strategic initiatives, and firms with a stronger EC market orientation will be more successful

Chaston. (2001)	<i>International Small Business Journal</i>	Fill the gap in empirical evidence in the small firms literature on the relative importance of double versus single-loop learning and the role of the learning systems required to support the learning process.	188 small manufacturing firms	UK	Focus group with 56 senior managers of small UK manufacturing firms, followed by a massive survey emailed to managing directors of 800 small UK manufacturing firms randomly selected. Component analysis, anova and manova performed on data.	A double-loop learning style which can lead to new core competencies and competitive advantage in respect to those competitors adopting a single loop learning style.
Chiware & Dick. (2008)	<i>The Electronic Library</i>	Assess the current levels of use and the potential of the technologies in increasing information dissemination and increase enterprises' competitiveness	197 SME operators, and 35 business support organization	Namibia	two questionnaires, plus a qualitative assessment of business information services, carried in 15 business support organizations.	The adoption of e-Commerce strategy falls into the category of discontinuous innovation, asking for strategic innovation, since it calls for fundamental reconceptualization of the business model and the reshaping of existing markets (by breaking the rules and changing the nature of competition) to achieve dramatic value improvements for customers and high growth for companies
Cloete, Courtney, & Fintz. (2002)	<i>Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries</i>	Explore how small businesses in a developing country perceive the potential benefit of e-commerce and look at their consequent adoption of e-commerce activities in their own organizations	34 small manufacturing businesses	South Africa	Questionnaire to test the perception of e-commerce benefits and e-commerce adoption levels amongst small manufacturing business in the Western Cape.	The available technologies are not adopted to the extent that is necessary for survival in a rapidly changing environment.

Dedrick & Kraemer. (2001)	<i>Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries</i>	Report on the state of the art in China on Internet, e-commerce, government policy, computer market, software, IT services, and computers production.	Existing literature	China	Review of government 's reports and documents	There are many barriers that must be surmounted if China is to tap the potential of the Internet and e-commerce, including high telecommunications cost, lack of needed legal guidelines, and some aspects of consumer behavior and business practices.
Drew. (2003)	<i>European Management Journal</i>	Explore areas of the strategic uses of e-Commerce	200 businesses which (i) had established active websites, (ii) appeared to be conducting e-business to some degree, (iii) fit the UK definition of an SME and (iv) were independent rather than the subsidiary or branch of another entity	East of England	Survey based on questionnaire	The most important driving forces for adopting e-commerce are industry changes and trends, opportunities for growth, the need to keep up with competitors, and the threat posed by larger competitors.
Gadish. (2009)	<i>Journal of Cases on Information Technology</i>	Analyze the marketing strategy of an online store	Case study of a family owned and operated dental supply company, serving the local community of dentists.	Southern California (U.S.A)	Case analysis	A decision to modernize sales processes came as revenues from the traditional model started falling and existing clients started ordering dental supplies from competitors.
Griffith and Krampf. (1998)	<i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i>	Examine the strategic uses of web-based retailing for traditional retailers	Top 100 U.S. retailers	USA	Comprehensive content analysis of web sites.	A majority of retailers are utilizing their web sites for advertising, public relations, and customer services access.
Hadjamoni. (1999)	<i>R&D Management</i>	Identify the main factors influencing the innovativeness in small firms	140 businesses	Cyprus	Correlation, multiple regression and multiple discriminant analysis, based on vis-a-vis interviews following a 20 pages questionnaire	The main variables affecting innovation include strategy, expenditure on R&D, co-operation with external technology providers, use of technological information sources, and overall performance of the firm. Contrary to literature claims, intensity of competition was not correlated with innovation.

Herbig and Hale. (1997)	<i>Internet Research</i>	Discuss the future of the internet, and its impact on marketing strategies.	Press articles, opinion leader speeches and interviews, and other second hand data	USA	Summary of press articles	The computerized information boom has enormous potential to boost economies world-wide. Access to the web is proving to be a much greater resource than traditional means of advertising. The internet can help companies appeal the audience of all ages, build customer relationship by providing information on products, allow small business compete with Fortune 500 companies without incurring the costs expected in such an undertaking.
Huang. (2008)	<i>Service Industries Journal</i>	Investigate the B&B adoption of e-commerce strategy, and empirically build a model for the burgeoning B&B industry adopting e-commerce strategies in e-service.	155 B&B businesses	Taiwan	Longitudinal analysis by descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and linear structural relations	identified the e-Commerce development strategy dimensions by business as being pursued to gain resource advantage, competitive advantage and performance advantage. Resource advantage mainly consists of improving professional management capabilities and increasing the likelihood of adopting a double loop form of organizational learning which can lead to new core competencies and competitive advantage.
Jennex, Amoroso, & Adelakun. (2004)	<i>Electronic Commerce Research</i>	Analyze infrastructure factors affecting the success of small companies in developing economies that are establishing B2B e-commerce ventures.	2 case studies	Castelfranco (Italy) and Kyiv (Ukraine)	Action research and case study of two companies	There are five main success factors for companies establishing B2B e-commerce ventures: people factor, technical infrastructure, client interface, business infrastructure, and regulatory interface. Each factor has several attributes.
Levenburg and Magal. (2005)	<i>e-Service Journal</i>	Demonstrate the value of Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) as a tool to assess e-business strategy based on underlying motivation, and make resource allocation recommendations. Identify small firms' motivations for engaging in e-business	Evaluate e-business strategies among small organizations and make resource allocation recommendations.	USA	Importance Performance Analysis (IPA)	Motivations to engage in e-commerce fall into different categories: (i) marketing-related; (ii) desire to develop and strengthen a relationship with key constituents; (iii) Aiming to improve financial performance; (iv) desire to obtaining information; (v) Buying reasons. Results indicate that customer-focused motivations are most important in adopting e-business; improving profitability is least important.

Levenburg and Klein. (2006)	<i>Information Systems Journal</i>	Examine the practices of small and medium sized enterprises, and analyses performance results of adopting selected customer service applications on the internet	400 SMEs	Midwestern. USA	6 page self-administered survey questionnaire mailed to sample businesses, selected from the Dun and Bradstreet database. Selected businesses were at least 5 years old, had five or more employees, and resided in the locale of interest.	
MacGregor, and Kartiwi. (2010)	<i>Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations</i>	Compare the perception of barriers to e-commerce adoption in developed and developing economies.	247 non-adopters in Australia; 96 non-adopters in Indonesia.	Australia and Indonesia	247 phone interviews in Australia, 330 surveys distributed in Indonesia. The Cronchbach's Alpha test for reliability was applied to both data.	The perception of importance of barriers to e-commerce adoption differs across the two locations. Security is far more critical in developing economies,
Markus and Soh. (2002)	<i>Journal of Global Information Management</i>	Explore the influence of structural condition on	Literature	Asia vs/ USA	Review of the literature	Valid explanation of global differences in e-commerce activity require a careful assessment of relevant structural factors, varying across countries and cultures. Among these factors there are physical, social and economic arrangements that shape e-commerce business models, and influence individual and organizational use of the internet.

Molla, Heeks, and Balcells. (2006)	<i>European Journal of Information Systems</i>	Explore why and how one small business adopted e-commerce	Single case study (wine retailing microenterprise)	Catalonia, Spain	Detailed interviews with the owner-manager, accompanied with examination of pertinent internal documentation such as annual reports, financial statements, minutes, web design drafts.	Expand the technology-organizations-environment framework developed by Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990), by including managerial factors, and grouping the factors affecting e-Commerce adoption into four categories: contextual, organizational, managerial, and e-commerce specific. Confirm the value of understanding e-commerce adoption in small enterprise through a four-way categorization, encompassing contextual organizational, managerial, and e-commerce specific factors. Highlights the way in which the adoption of e-commerce involves phases of initiation, decision and implementation. Offers historical insight into the process of e-commerce adoption
Mukti. (2000)	<i>Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries</i>	Identify potential barriers to e-commerce expansion	50 businesses engaged in e-commerce	Llang Valley. Malaysia	Postal survey	The most recurrent categories of barriers to e-commerce adoption relate to security, and the uncertain nature of the legal contract between supplier and customer.
Mutula & VanBrakel. (2007)	<i>Library Hi Tech</i>	Characterize the ICT sector in terms of, among other things, the skills needs in the sector for the purpose of powering the emerging digital economy. Cover the status of ICT skills for the digital economy in both developed and developing countries.	55 Key stakeholders within the ICT sector in Botswana, including Botswana Telecommunication Corporation, Botswana Power Corporation, business community, academia, researchers and legal experts.	Botswana	Focus group to collect data from key stakeholders in the ICT sector. Analysis of data using thematic categorization.	Highlights the existence of an acute global shortage of high skilled and hands-on personnel necessary for steering the emerging digital economy, in both developed and developing countries, including Botswana. There is a serious skills gap for certified specialists to help develop the sophisticated applications necessary to power the digital economy and more so the applications that depend on it.

Oshikoya & Hussain. (1998)	<i>African Development Review</i>	Analyse the challenges and developmental issues faced by African countries in respect to ICT	Literature	Africa	Conceptual - Review of literature	African countries face a number of critical issues related with development. Integrating Africa into the world of information technology with its vast global infrastructure will provide the means that address most of these challenges. To this end, African countries need to upgrade their capabilities in order to increase their connectivity to global information through the improvement of their telecommunication infrastructure and the acquisition of computer and computer-related equipment.
Pool, Parnell, Spillan, Carraher, and Lester. (2006)	<i>International Journal of Information Technology and Management</i>	Discuss the current state of e-commerce development in SMEs, outline the challenges faced by many SMEs and propose several options for e-commerce integration	Literature	Developed economies	Review of literature	E-commerce growth is spawned by the recognition of long-term benefits for SME's and is achieved when owners, managers, and entrepreneurs acknowledge that proper management and attention to detail is critical part of internet commerce. When managed effectively, e-business can transform an SME into another market; where customers tend to be younger, well-educated and more affluent. Maintaining an internet presence among SMEs in developed countries has provided access to new customers, while increasing sales and profits. The same can be expected as internet accessibility increases in emerging economies. Strategic growth decisions to develop an integrated approach to e-commerce can help improving customer service while increasing revenues. Proactive channel development can position an SME as market leader.
Samanta and Kyriazopoulos, 2009	<i>International Journal of Knowledge and Learning</i>	Identify the impact of business process improvement in the area of e-marketing in the hotel industry in Greece.	30 hotels	Greece	SWAT analysis on a sample of hotels in the city of Athens	The majority of firms in the hotel industry in Greece use e-marketing concept to improve their communication strategy and reach market segments. In order to make a further use of e-business, there is a need for change of organizational culture, infrastructure, and the strategic planning of use and development of the e-business.

Schlegelmilch, Diamantopoulos & Kreuz. (2003)	<i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i>	Trace the notion of strategic innovation in the literature, and offer corporate examples from Amazon.com and Swatch to illustrate key drivers and outcome of strategic innovation. Synthesize the insights gained in a Multiple Indicator-Multiple Causes (MIMIC) model	Literature + Amazon and SWATCH case analysis	USA - Europe	Literature review, case analysis, and MIMIC model application	Four antecedent drivers (i.e. culture, process, people, and resources) and two strategic outcomes (i.e. customer value and competitive positioning) of strategic innovation are identified and synthesized in a formal model that provide guidance for operationalizing the strategic innovation construct.
Surjadjaja, Ghosh, and Antony. (2003)	<i>Managing Service Quality</i>	Address the determinants essential for building a successful electronic service (e-service) operation. Clarify ambiguities in the boundaries between e-service, e-business, and e-commerce.	Literature	UK	Review of the literature	A framework recognizing the distinctiveness and commonalties between e-service, e-business, and e-commerce is provided, and a list of 20 determinants is offered. The determinates have been evaluated to gain better insight and understanding so that effective e-service operation can be designed, developed and deployed.
Zank and Vokurka (2003)	<i>SAM Advanced Management Journal</i>	understand: the impact of e-commerce on the relationships among supply chain members, specifically manufacturers, distributors, and industrial customers; the importance of e-commerce ability in selecting distributor partners; the perceived benefits of e-business; the perceived barriers to e-business; and the primary role of e-business in a company's overall business strategy	of manufacturers, distributors, and industrial customers	Emerging economies	survey	e-commerce was perceived as having a slightly positive impact on supply chain relationships but did not affect the selection of supply chain partners. Customers focused on the potential benefits of reducing costs, while manufacturers and distributors tended to emphasize the impact of e-commerce on customer-related issues. All groups cited a lack of standards and technical know-how as potential barriers to e-commerce. Managers should carefully weigh potential costs and benefits before adopting or expanding an e-commerce strategy.

Zhao, Wang, and Huang. (2008)	<i>Information & Management</i>	Develop a conceptual model suitable for analyzing B2B e market in China, to help in seeking effective strategies in creating an effective e-market in the Chinese business environment.	2 case studies: Alibaba and China National Commodity Exchange Center (CCEC).	China	Interviews to corporate executives and staff, accompanied by secondary data collection from the websites and peers	Personalized and customized services, the structure and control of transaction processes, and strategic partners network are found to be critical e-commerce activities. A B2B e-market model of e-commerce value creation is proposed. It illustrates the relationship between the components that support the process and the control of complexity, and provides guidelines in identifying the effective strategy, crucial business activities and value creation opportunities in each of the phases of the e-commerce process. The four phases of transactional process are described as information, negotiation, payment and delivery.
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